News release

Sunny climes for Argo float

10 July 2003

Data from the seas around Mauritius, which can help with the early detection of climate change, is now being received by the Met Office, thanks to the development of Argo, an international project to establish a global array of ocean floats. Following collaboration agreed last November, the Met Office has handed over an Argo underwater data-gathering float to the Mauritius Meteorological Services.

The Mauritius Meteorological Services launched the float from near the St Brandon Islands in mid-June. One of around 150 floats spread throughout the Indian Ocean, it has already reported its first profiles of temperature and salinity, showing the difference between the near surface waters - a balmy 25 °C - and the much colder deep water at 2,000 m at 2.5 °C. Argo floats gather information on the temperature and salinity of the upper 2,000 m of the ocean, which helps scientists at the Met Office to monitor climate changes in the oceans and to provide better long-term weather forecasts for areas of the world that are vulnerable to floods and droughts.

Each float drifts with the currents, at a typical depth of between 1,000 and 2,000 m beneath the surface, and every 10 days rises to the surface - as it rises it measures the temperature and salinity. Once at the surface, the float transmits its position and measurements to an orbiting satellite. The data is then relayed to meteorological and oceanographic centres worldwide.

Jon Turton, the UK Argo Programme Manager at the Met Office, said: "Argo is an international programme involving around 15 countries and the outcome - a better understanding of climate change and more reliable long-term forecasts - will ultimately benefit all nations, especially those whose weather and climate are strongly influenced by the sea. The involvement and support of smaller countries, such as Mauritius, is important because they can gain significant benefits from the information gained via the project."

For further information:
Met Office Press Office +44 (0)1392 886655

Met Office Customer Centre 0870 900 0100
If you're outside the UK +44 (0)1392 885680

Notes

Each float costs around £10,000, has a life of around four years and should make between 150 and 200 profiles. Ocean platforms, such as floats and buoys are of great importance, both for meteorological and marine safety reasons, but because of their locality are at risk of being damaged. The World Meteorological Organisation is now urging mariners around the world to take extra care when near weatherbuoys and floats.

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